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Helping People Help the Land



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Activity **report**



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Programs

With the extension of the 2008 Farm Bill, Texas NRCS is prepared to offer the same programs at nearly the same funding level as in past years. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program was funded at approximately \$75,000,000 and the county based Resource Teams have been working on their ranking criteria based on Local Work Group priorities. This program has open enrollment and we accept applications through out the year.

The first ranking deadline is quickly approaching which is February 15th. We will fund high and medium priority applications at that time. If funding remains, we will have a second ranking period deadline on April 19th to fund any remaining worthy applications. We have a goal of obligating all of the Texas funding by May 15th. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program funding has been prioritized to address the national initiatives.

The easement programs that include Wetland Reserve Program, Grassland Reserve Program and the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program have been funded for FY 13. We are accepting applications for these programs as well. However, they were not funded until the passage of the "fiscal cliff" bill on January 2nd so the ranking deadlines for these programs have not yet been established, but will be later than those identified for EQIP. Ranking deadline dates for these programs will be announced in local newspapers and will be available on our website at www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov.

Landscape Initiatives in Texas in FY 12



Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GOMI) - This initiative is aimed at helping agriculture producers in key watersheds above the Gulf of Mexico manage land and habitat to maintain profitability while improving water quality and keeping saltwater out of habitat needed by threatened and endangered species. In FY12, Texas farmers and ranchers participating in this initiative used \$370,110 in NRCS FA to apply conscientious conservation practices on 12,181 acres in the Lower San Antonio River watershed. *For Tivoli, Texas rancher Dallas Ford and other Gulf Coast landowners, the Gulf of Mexico Initiative means an opportunity to make a positive difference not only on their lands, but also in the inland waters that flow into the Gulf of Mexico.*



Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI) - This initiative was developed in response to the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to farmers, ranchers and other landowners to manage portions of their land to enhance habitat for migrating birds. Projects provide food, water and critical habitat for bird populations; support for local economies by attracting hunters and bird watchers; and new opportunities to improve wildlife management.

These migratory birds created circles as they landed to feed in Chambers County rice farmer Taylor Wilcox's flooded MBHI rice fields.



Long Leaf Pine Initiative (LLPI) - Through this approach, the NRCS is working with landowners to restore and enhance longleaf pine forests to improve critical wildlife habitat, as well as the health, sustainability and profitability of privately owned forests. NRCS provides financial and technical assistance focused on conservation practices which include forest site preparation, tree establishment, chemical application, fire breaks and prescribed burning. Landowners in Texas have enrolled 2,048 acres in this program to date, with \$89,418 in assistance from NRCS.

Tribal Council Chairman, Kyle Williams of the Alabama Coushatta Tribe of Texas, inspects the needles of a Longleaf Pine growing on the reservation in the rich soils of East Texas' Big Thicket.



Ogallala Aquifer Initiative (OAI) - With financial and technical assistance from NRCS, the OAI is designed to reduce the quantity of water removed from the aquifer by improving irrigation efficiency and applying conservation cropping system practices that help conserve water, improve water quality and enhance the economic viability of croplands and rangelands. To date, farmers and ranchers have 144 contracts on 30,315 acres with \$5.1 million in assistance from NRCS.

Dumas, Texas farmer David Ford has installed water-efficient irrigation systems, as well as switched to a no-till farming system which allows his crops to retain soil moisture better, reducing the need to apply water.



Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative (LPCI) - Through the LPCI, NRCS and its conservation partners are helping farmers and ranchers in Texas to enhance, restore and protect habitat for the Lesser prairie-chicken, currently a species of concern. Through the LPCI, NRCS has proved landowners \$665,504 to apply conservation practices on 31,601 acres to promote healthy grazing lands and are also beneficial for the lesser prairie-chicken.

L.H. Webb, a rancher in Pampa, Texas, has worked with NRCS to implement rotational grazing and brush management practices on his ranch to benefit the lesser prairie-chicken.

Events & Activities

CStP Reaches 50M Mark

Thanks to conservation efforts of Texas farmers and ranchers and other conservation-minded agriculture producers, 50 million acres have been enrolled in USDA's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) in just four years. From improving soil health to sending cleaner water downstream, this program is improving the environment, including the landscape here in Texas. Over 1,500 landowners in Texas have enrolled nearly 3.5 million acres CSP. In fact, a 65,000 acre CSP contract in Texas pushed the nation to its 50 millionth acre enrolled.

Seasonal High Tunnels Gaining Popularity in Texas

Seasonal High Tunnels is a relatively new practice offered under USDA's "Know Your Farmer, Know your Food" initiative, and with financial assistance through EQIP. The demand for them has been increasing in field offices across Texas. Seasonal high tunnels are structures made of plastic or metal pipe and covered with plastic or other sheeting. Easy to build, maintain and move, they provide an energy-efficient way to extend the growing season. Unlike greenhouses, they require no energy, relying on natural sunlight to modify the climate inside to create favorable conditions for growing vegetables and other specialty crops.

Pat and Elvis d'Agrella have been selling produce for a few years at farmers markets in and around the greater Houston area. Through a NRCS program, they constructed a seasonal high tunnel in September to expand their produces growing seasons.



NRCS Texas Website Gets Makeover

In an effort to provide better access to more information, NRCS is transitioning its website to a new format that will more closely align with the www.usda.gov website. The NRCS national website has already been reformatting to this new style, which can be viewed at www.nrcs.usda.gov. The NRCS Texas website is one of the first state websites to feature this style. It will be unveiled on February 15, 2012 at its existing web address: www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov

Sign up for NRCS email updates through GovDelivery!

USDA NRCS offices are moving towards a paperless operation, and farmers and ranchers across the nation now have a more efficient, timely option for receiving important NRCS program eligibility requirements, deadlines and related information. Producers are asked to enroll in the new GovDelivery system which will provide agency news releases, newsletters, and program reminders electronically directly to your inbox.

GovDelivery is a one-stop shop for the most up-to-date USDA program information. Through NRCS's GovDelivery electronic news service, producers can establish subscriber preferences by choosing to receive federal farm program information by topic, by state and/or by county. Producers can select as many subscriber options as they want, and receive updates from each county in which they operate or have an interest.

To begin using GovDelivery, subscribe online at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>



Soil Health Campaign

NRCS recently launched a new campaign aimed at helping landowners understand the value of improving the health of their soil. "Unlock the Secrets of Soil" focuses more attention on soil health and educates our customers and the public about the positive impact healthy soils can have on productivity and conservation, we can help our Nation's farmers and ranchers feed the world more profitably and sustainably – now and for generations to come.

The National Association of Conservation Districts and 19 other farm groups and organizations recently signed a letter supporting NRCS' Soil Health effort, citing soil health as "part of a systems approach to agriculture production that benefits the landscape, reduces nutrient loading and sediment runoff, increases efficiencies, and sustains wildlife habitat, while providing the potential for cost savings to producers."

The resources on this soil health section of our site are designed to help visitors understand the basics and benefits of soil health – and to learn about Soil Health Management Systems from farmers who are using those systems. The information can be found at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Texas Ranch up for National Environmental Award

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), is set to announce their national Environmental Stewardship Award Program Winner at Cattle Industry Convention in Tampa, FL on Thurs., Feb. 7, 2013.

Blooming Grove, Texas' 77 Ranch, owned and operated by Gary and Sue Price is one of regional winners competing for the award. The Prices began their impressive resource conservation management program when they began working with the NRCS in 1994. Since then they have evolved into national role models of cooperative conservation. They are teaming up with corporate partner, MillerCoors Brewing Co., to implement conservation practices, such as cross fencing and reseeded, to accomplish conservation goals that improve and protect water quality and quantity in the Trinity River Basin.

Established in 1991 by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), the program has recognized the outstanding stewardship practices and conservation achievements of U.S. cattle producers for more than two decades. Award winners are honored for their commitment to protecting the environment and improving fish and wildlife habitat while operating profitable cattle businesses.



Gary & Sue Price's passion for conservation and leadership ability make them an ideal example of land stewards who understand the land while successfully operating a cattle and wildlife operation.

Grazing Enthusiasts Gather for Successful Fifth National Conference on Grazing

More than 450 grazing enthusiasts from across the U.S. gathered in Orlando, FL, Dec. 9-12 for the Fifth National Conference on Grazing Lands (5NCGL). This event focused on grazing lands and the conservation benefits they offer to America's livestock producers, watersheds and wildlife.



Over 90 Texas landowners attended the event, including representatives from the Texas Small Farmers and Ranchers CBO, the Texas-Mexico Border Coalition CBO, the Rio Bravo RCD. The Texas GLCI sponsored the Texas land owners to attend. These are the primary organizations tasked with coordinating outreach efforts and training, along with providing technical assistance to socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

NRCS Texas employees Salvador Salinas, Jeff Goodwin, Kent Ferguson, Jason Hohlt and Matt Kraus attended to take part in the more than 100 presentations featured, about half of which were by producers. They attended forums focused on the agricultural/urban interface, successful cutting-edge management technologies for grazing practices, economic and marketing implications of grazing, public policy implications of grazing and optimizing grazing land health for environmental and social benefits.

The conference's five featured speakers included Temple Grandin, an expert on animal agriculture; Fred Provenza, an emeritus professor of animal behavior and management at Utah State University; Garry Lacefield, a University of Kentucky forage specialist; Don Ball, an Auburn University Extension agronomist; and Kit Pharo, a Colorado producer who specializes in raising livestock with minimal inputs.

The Fifth National Conference on Grazing Lands was



Ollie Ross, Small Farmers and Ranchers CBO presented NRCS Texas State Conservationist Salvador Salinas (center) with a Distinguished Service Award for his efforts to provide assistance to socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

hosted by the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative with sponsorship support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Agricultural Research Service, the Bureau of Land Management, Mosaic Company, Farm Credit and numerous additional sponsors. For additional information visit www.glci.org.

Texas GLCI will sponsor a Grazing Lands Conference in Fort Worth, July 15-18, 2013. The conference will be very producer focused with 17 rancher speakers and Temple Grandin. More details to come at www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov